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Mutineers Shell Military Headquarters, Seize Hotel

Eds: LEADS thru to UPDATE with details on shelling of military headquarters, cardinal's appeal

By EILEEN GUERRERO

Associated Press Writer

MANILA, Philippines (AP) - Rebel artillerymen trying to topple President Corazon Aquino blasted the headquarters of the armed forces early Sunday, setting off a huge fire and reportedly killing at least three people.

The attack belied government claims that the latest coup attempt, the most serious against Mrs. Aquino's government, had been crushed.

Brig. Gen. Oscar Florendo said the bombardment of the military headquarters, Camp Aguinaldo, began about 1:30 a.m., and government helicopter gunships counterattacked at dawn.

Shells set fire to the Headquarters Service Company building and hundreds of military families fled the sprawling garrison.

The barrage of 105mm howitzer shells killed at least three people and wounded 25, according to nearby hospitals.

Florendo said there was hand-to-hand fighting in the streets around Camp Aguinaldo and four of rebel armored vehicles were destroyed.

As fighting intensified Cardinal Jaime Sin, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Manila, appealed for the rebels to stop their attacks.

"Your crusade has resulted in the loss of so many innocent lives," he said in a radio address. "I am pleading with you to return to your senses and surrender."

On Saturday, mutineers seized a luxury hotel and other buildings in Manila's Makati financial district, where many diplomats and foreigners live. Sixteen people were reported killed and about 100 wounded in that fighting but officials gave no details.

They said at least 42 people have been killed and 200 wounded since rebels launched their attacks early Friday.

Military officials said one coup leader - an associate of renegade Lt. Col. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, who led an August 1987 coup try - had been arrested.

The army commander, Maj. Gen. Manuel Cacanando, said he was nearly captured in the early hours of the assault. Cacanando said the mutineers - believed to number from 800 to 2,000 - included some of his most elite units.

Mrs. Aquino, facing the sixth attempted coup since coming to power four years ago, told mutineers to surrender or die.

Hundreds of rebels swarmed Saturday over Makati, roaming through affluent shops, taking over the Intercontinental Hotel and taking up positions on skyscrapers. It was not known how many guests were registered at the hotel. The guests were allowed to stay inside, but mutineers ran other people out.

Rebels blocked off a major street with commandeered trucks. One mutineer said his group changed the color of its shoulder patches from white to red "because red is the color of blood, and we want to shed blood for our cause."

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Military Chief of Staff Gen. Renato de Villa said rebels controlled parts of Manila and the Mactan Air Base in Cebu, 350 miles south of Manila.

Late Saturday, rebels firing from a speeding car killed one policeman and wounded 14 others in Manila.

Also Saturday, three gunmen fired at the Makati home of Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus, but he was not there. Gunmen also killed 14 soldiers and a bystander.

Police said some assailants may have been Communist insurgents seeking to take advantage of confusion brought on by the coup attempt, which began Friday when mutineers seized air force headquarters at Villamor Air Base in Manila, the government television station, and other strongpoints.

Mrs. Aquino's failure to crush the 20-year-old Communist insurgency is one reason for the discontent with her government, particularly within the military. She also has been criticized for not improving the Philippines' economy since coming to power in a 1986 military-civilian uprising that ousted President Ferdinand Marcos.

In the early hours of the coup, the army's commanding general said mutineers took hostage the entire operations staff of the army and nearly captured him when they seized parts of Fort Bonifacio.

'A few seconds more and they would have gotten me,' Cacanando said in a radio interview Saturday. Cacanando said he hid nearly 24 hours.

Late Friday, rebels left their remaining strongholds after U.S. warplanes began flying air cover for government troops at Mrs. Aquino's request. The government said the coup attempt had failed, but fighting flared again.

Government jets and helicopter gunships pounded rebel positions near Camp Aguinaldo Saturday and the insurgents fired back with tanks, mortars and machine guns.

In one attack, air force jets accidentally strafed 2,000 pro-government troopers, killing six.

Mrs. Aquino said in a televised statement: 'We shall not entertain any offer to negotiate from those who have shamelessly betrayed the solemn oath of a soldier to defend the constitution.'

'We leave them two choices: surrender or die.'

Opposition Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile said the situation showed the government had lost control of most of its 160,000-member military.

U.S. sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the presence of armed rebels in Makati, where many Americans live, alarmed the U.S. Embassy.

The sources said U.S. officials had asked churches frequented by Americans to cancel Sunday services to encourage U.S. citizens in their congregations to remain at home.

The opposition Nacionalista Party of Vice President Salvador Laurel condemned the decision to call for U.S. military help as a 'brazen violation and insult' to national sovereignty.

The United States has six military installations in the Philippines, and there is strong opposition to them in the Philippines Senate, where legislators say they infringe on national sovereignty.

A statement issued in the name of Honasan also denounced Mrs. Aquino for requesting U.S. support. The statement, delivered to news organizations, urged citizens to support mutineers for 'the attainment of a genuine Filipino government.'